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About AMSA

Since its founding in 1982, the American Medallic Sculpture Association (AMSA) has encouraged the development and appreciation of medallic sculpture as one of the fine arts.

Each of our members has a special involvement with and interest in medals. Sculptors, collectors, museum curators, mint and foundry representatives, educators, writers and researchers, and other friends of the medal belong to the American Medallic Sculpture Association.

AMSA is the hub of a lively interchange of experience, ideas, knowledge and opinion among members, as well as the catalyst for outreach programs to the general public.

Juried exhibitions of members' work in museums and galleries is one AMSA program for introducing both collectors and the general public to medallic art. AMSA also issues limited-edition art medals by sculptor-members.

We invite you to join us. See the inside back cover for details on how to become an AMSA member and/or how to acquire a limited-edition AMSA art medal.

Alan M. Stahl, Curator of Medals American Numismatic Society

MEDALLIC SCULPTURE

Tenth Anniversary



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edition art medal just released by AMSA.

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An Artist's View of Contemporary Coinage

by Elizabeth Jones

In view of my convictions as a sculptor and from my experiences and observations as Chief Sculptor/Engraver of the U.S. Mint, I am not too optimistic about the prospects of well-designed coinage in the United States. Admittedly my standards are high.

As Francesco Giannone, one of my professors at the Scuola dell'Arte della Medaglia in Rome, stated,

A medal or coin should be like a poem . . . in the sense that the artist must express the essence of his or her ideas with clarity, simplicity, strength and elegance in the small space of a circle, just as a poet must subject his ideas to the constraints of an established form, such as the sonnet.

Poetic expression must be matched by "a perfect understanding of technique," as another professor, Renato Signorini, wrote in his preface to the catalogue of one of my exhibitions. "This knowledge," he explained, "is acquired only through a diligent artisan experience, particularly in evidence during the Renaissance, when there was 'the finest wedding of craftsmanship and art."

Yet, my generation has seen the avant-garde become mainstream in art, styles replaced by trends, and "beauty" become an expurgated term. Another development we've been forced to witness is the final divorce of art from craftsmanship. In coinage, modern technology did much to bring about the ensuing deprivation.

The richly detailed, thoroughly sculptural qualities of great Renaissance medals are not appropriate models for late 20th-century coinage. For one reason, medals and coins are two distinctly different art forms.

A medal or coin should be like a poem.

Yet the distinction between the two has become blurred in the last decade, to the detriment of coinage as well as stamped medals, through the "magical" powers of the reducing machines used by private and government mints.

Renaissance medals were modeled directly, and thus their richness of detail

was designed and executed to scale. Using the technology of the reducing machine, modern coinage instead is modeled much larger than actual size, and then reduced to exactly fit the size of the coin. This has led to a proliferation of images alien to coins, to a ubiquitous inclination to heap "tedious detail upon irrelevant detail," in the words of Leonard Baskin, to



Coins of ancient Greece designed and executed to scale (from top): A gold 100 litra from Syracuse (390 B.C.) depicting Herakles and a Nemean lion; a coin from Thurium (c. 380 B.C.); and a silver decadrachm from Syracuse (480 B.C.) showing Arethusa.

produce what I call "picture post-card" effects.

For example, on a coin commemorating our nation's independence, one might see 10 figures huddled around a table, each holding a quill in his eager hand. On others there are so many portraits and symbols crammed into the

Excerpted from a lecture given at a symposium in Washington, D.C. (November 9, 1992), organized by the American Numismatic Society in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution's National Numismatic Collection.



Indian Head 5-cent piece (1913-38) created by James Earle Fraser.

miniscule circular shape that the coins should be sold with a magnifying glass—like the condensed *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Modern technology also has lessened the need for coin designers to have any training whatsoever in the art of coin design. Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the designs rendered by the painters, illustrators, etc., whom mints invite to design coins either are not coinable or produce very unsatisfactory coins from an aes-



U.S. Olympic commemorative silver dollar (1983) designed by Elizabeth Jones.

thetic viewpoint.

Greek coins, such as those from the 4th and 5th centuries B.C. shown on the previous page, remain the archetypal image of coinage. In the 20th-century United States, then President Theodore Roosevelt commissioned sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and others to produce new coinage. Roosevelt's vision called for coinage so beautiful as to rival that of the ancient Greeks. Mint-produced coins, Roosevelt felt, lacked vitality and relevance to what he perceived as an emerging new era here and abroad. The Peace dollar of 1921 by Anthony de Francisci is the last of the remarkable, circulating coins produced to meet Roosevelt's challenge. In my view, it marks the end of the past in United States coin history.

The future of U.S. coinage, of course, already is with us. True to our advertising-age, message-happy environment, United States law calls for multiple inscriptions on commemorative and circulating coins. "United States of America," "Liberty," "In God We Trust," "E Pluribus Unum," the date, and the denomination written in full all must appear on each of our coins. In the case of the 1983 Olympic silver dollar commemorative, Congress instructed that stars, the five Olympic rings, and the legends "Los Angeles" and "XXIII Olympiad" also had to appear on the small surface of the coin I designed.

My vision had been to create a very contemporary coin using the classic discobolos to symbolize the Olympic games. Because I wanted to convey a sense of motion, I superimposed three silhouettes of the discus thrower, as if frozen in three successive frames. The silhouettes, each a receding flat plane, also provide a level of contemporary abstraction, which I reinforced by the use of incuse lines to indicate the essential anatomical features.

Even though the result won an international "Coin of the Year" award, I think of it as a prime example of how a promising idea was botched by rules and regulations made by individuals with little visual imagination and not much concern for the end product.

Having learned my lesson, I decided to claim the precedent of Saint-Gaudens, and limit the inscriptions on the obverse of the 1986 Statue of Liberty half eagle to "Liberty" and the date. The composition achieved is totally asymmetrical, and almost all of its elements run right into the border. These are characteristics of many excellent coins, but they will not be found anymore in our present coinage. Why? They do not comply with the United States Mint's technical guidelines (in effect since 1987) for artists taking part in invited competitions.

How much poorer our nation's iconography would be had such guidelines existed in the first decades of this century! We would have been deprived of the powerful image of the Buffalo nickel, the elegant Standing Liberty 25-cent piece, the Saint-Gaudens \$20 gold piece, the Walking Liberty half dollar, the reverse of the Peace dollar (the obverse just made it). The Mint would argue that modern production runs are so much larger, it is impossible to mint coin designs like that today. I say that the world's leading industrial nation ought to be able to mass produce beautiful coins.

My pessimism about the prospects of well-designed coinage grows in direct proportion to the worldwide popularity of proof coins. With their mirrored surfaces upon which relief elements appear to float in space, proof coins bring new meaning to the term "cookie cutter." Since the technical virtuosity of achieving a bright, shiny surface overwhelms every other feature of the coins, they all begin to look alike. Anyone who has spent time in front of a classic relief knows that its background is an in-

What will future archaeologists have to say about our coins?

separable part of the sculpture—that its sculpted surfaces depend on the subtlest differentiation of levels and the nuances of light and shadow.

Undeniably the demand for proof coins is real. In my mind, the question is whether public institutions, like mints, should exploit such opportunities, or whether they should leave them to private business, where the competitive climate at

least will prevent fads from turning into perennials. I have my doubts whether marketplace or committee room can pass the better judgment on the artistic quality of a coin design. Still, it is my experience that both regularly underestimate consumers' ability to judge for themselves. In other words, much of the "dumbing down" comes from above.

Thus, it might well have been the artistic inferiority of a 1990 coin design that caused the first-ever sales loss of \$1.1 million for an American commemorative, as the United States Mint admitted to the House Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs and Coinage. Perhaps collectors are not as gullible as the Mint previously assumed. Of course, the shortfall also might be attributed to the Mint's saturation of the commemorative coin market.

Coinage has been debased throughout history. In our own time, the main cause has been rising metal prices. The Coinage Act of 1965 responded to this problem by giving the United States "clad" coins to camouflage the elimination of silver from dimes and quarters. Numerous



U.S. silver Peace dollar (1921-35), designed by Anthony de Francisci.

other governments solved this problem more creatively by introducing bimetallic coins. In fact, there is ancient historical precedent for this solution. Some archaeologists believe that the discovery of bimetallic objects in a 9th-century B.C. excavation at Hasanlu in western Iran indicates "an aesthetically sensitive environment" in which experimentation was encouraged.

What will future archaeologists have to say about our coins and our culture? My problem is quite the



Plaster model of the obverse of the Statue of Liberty \$5 gold commemorative coin (1986) created by Elizabeth Jones.



A bimetallic 20 francs issued by France (1992).

opposite from the sort archaeologists face: I am dealing with a subject I am much too close to-late 20th-century coin design. I admit that mine is a declaredly subjective viewpoint. It is the opinion of one who is primarily a sculptor and, as such, has never ceased to look long and hard at all kinds of art from all periods and parts of the world. I understand that the prevailing attitudes of those in power will not be modified until and unless our society becomes more of an "aesthetically sensitive environment." All we can do in the meantime is preserve the knowledge of standards to keep our memory of artistic and creative excellence alive.

"Lost Wax" Cast Medals

by Jean Schonwalter

For thousands of years, artisans all over the world created metal objects by the "lost wax" method of casting. Probably the earliest practitioners were the craftsmen of ancient India and Egypt; the Shang, Chou and Han dynasties in China; and the makers of the great bronzes of Nara and Kamakura in Japan. In the succeeding centuries, the technique of lost wax, or *cire perdu*, casting basically has not changed.

The History of Medalmaking

The art of medalmaking sprang from Renaissance society's new awareness of self, and the artists' desire to achieve a kind of immortality by creating enduring images of themselves. The Renaissance painter Pisanello generally is recognized as the earliest medalist (1395–c. 1455). His technical and artistic skills as a portraitist were much sought after; he was employed by the Vatican and all the major courts of northern Italy, where humanist learning was gaining ground.

Since the Renaissance, each generation of medalists has wrestled with the basic constraints of medalmaking—size, shape, content and medium. While there is an explosion of new ideas and techniques in the field today, medals continue to be a medium through which the memory of a person, event or idea can be saved from obliteration by the passage of time.

The art of the medal unites painting and modeling in an essentially pictorial format that also has the tactile qualities of sculpture. Medals are private works that can be held and touched, turned over and perused, felt and enjoyed. They are an intimate art form, readily accessible, relatively inexpensive, and a delight to make and collect.

The Lost-Wax Technique

Medals produced by this centuries-old method of casting are first modeled in wax. The wax model then is encased in layers and layers of plaster, often mixed with silica, which dries as a solid chunk and is known as



Renaissance medals embodied man's new awareness of self.

an "investment." The investment has a hole in the bottom that is connected directly to the wax form within. When the investment is fired in a hot oven or furnace, the wax is "lost"—that is, it melts and runs out through the hole. (In foundry language, this is called "burnout.") What remains inside the investment is an exact impression of the wax model. Into this empty space, molten medal—usually bronze, if a medal is being cast—is poured very carefully. When the metal cools and solidifies, the invest-

ment is smashed, and a rough casting of the medal emerges.

Some technical details of lostwax casting vary, such as the specific method of attaching the wax "gates," "sprues" and "risers" that vent the gases and oxygen before burnout. New methods of "ceramic shell" investment actually eliminate most gates and sprues, and still produce beautiful and exact



Before casting, wax images are attached to a tree-like, wax "sprue." Waxes used in the "lost wax" process are derived from three main sources: animals and insects; minerals and petroleum; and vegetables. Natural waxes have working qualities superior to synthetic waxes. Schonwalter's favorite is microcrystalline wax, which is extremely malleable, yet firm enough to maintain its form if carefully handled.

definition. In addition, each foundry has its own jealously guarded formula for making the bronze alloy of copper, tin, lead and zinc. Some foundries are even said to add a small amount of human hair to the alloy to enhance the beauty and strength of the bronze.

Once the rough casting is removed from the investment, it must be hand-finished. Hand metal-working tools of various kinds, as well as grinders, rotary files, acid baths and even sandblasters, are used in the finishing process to perfect the surface of the medal and remove any extraneous material (such as gates, which are cast right along with the medal). The cracks or holes that sometimes appear in the casting can be filled using welding rods or solder of similarly colored metal.

The finished medal now is ready for "patination," or coloring, which can range from brown to black to green, depending on the chemicals used (notably liver of sulphur, ferric nitrate, cupric nitrate or ammonium chloride). Finally, the patinated bronze medal receives a clear coat of wax to preserve the color. Thus, a bronze medal created by this unique process begins and ends with wax.



Medalist Jean Schonwalter demonstrates lost-wax techniques at an AMSA workshop.

Virginiseen

Adapted from a lecture at New Jersey's Newark Museum in conjunction with an exhibition by the American Medallic Sculpture Association, January 1991.

AMSA LIMITED-EDITION ART MEDAL. Number Four.

PEARL by Virginia Janssen

Delicate, fragile, yet a survivor of the tides of time. That's how I remember her. Like a real pearl, her existence was unique, touched by extraordinary chance, inner grace, and the abundant blessings of time.

PEARL . . . unique, touched by chance, grace, and the blessings of time . . .

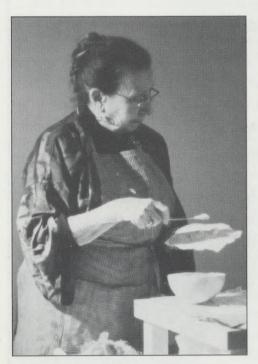
I designed this medal to honor Pearl. The obverse represents a shell opening to reveal a precious pearl on a soft bed of feathers. Because my Pearl, fragile and birdlike, loved birds. The reverse depicts the elements that shape a pearl. Knowing her helped shape who I am.

PEARL. Individually numbered, limited edition in bronze, 3 inches in diameter. \$75 plus \$6 postage for AMSA members; \$100 plus \$6 postage for nonmembers. Available through AMSA (see order form on inside back cover).

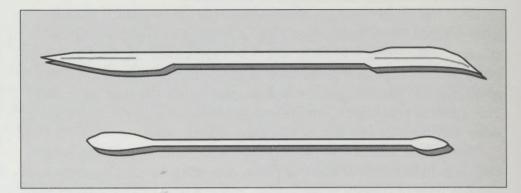
Modeling a Medal Directly in Plaster

by Leonda Finke

he primary reason for working directly in plaster is that all the textured, polished, and carved areas of the medal will exhibit the sense of spontaneity that comes only when the finished model is fresh from the hand of the sculptor. Another reason is that wet, flowing plaster is similar to molten metal; a hard plaster surface is similar to cast metal. Your plaster model and the finished cast or strike therefore are a close match. Because of this, the finished work will have a feeling of "truth to material," and the work will have integrity. A final, practical reason is that you can easily rework plaster by merely wetting the old surface thoroughly.



Leonda Finke adds just enough plaster to coat the top of the wire mesh and penetrate the holes.



Small plaster or wax tools are helpful for adding details or carving the hardened plaster image.

Materials

You will need:

- Hardware cloth with approximately 1/8" openings. This is a stiff wire mesh sold by the yard. Window screen is not suitable. It is too fine, too soft.
- Plaster of Paris, extra fine if possible.
- Small- and medium-pointed watercolor brushes.
- Small plaster or wax tools; for example, a long, flat, rounded spatula for dripping, beading or applying raised relief images; a sharp, pointed, knife-like tool for scraping, carving and cutting the hardened plaster image; a large spatula; and shears. Dental instruments are useful.
- Fine sandpaper and ScotchBriteTM or whatever else you find achieves the surface finish you prefer. *Experiment* with tools and finishes.
- Half a hollow rubber ball, approximately 6" in diameter, in which to mix plaster. Squeeze it to crack out dried plaster and debris.

Procedure

- 1) Cut several pieces of hardware cloth into shapes that interest you. On a level surface, place a sheet of wet, wrung-out paper towel, or lightly oil a Formica or "plexi" surface. Place several pieces of cut-out, flattened hardware cloth on this surface.
- 2) Fill the rubber ball with 2" to 3" of cold water. Add plaster to form a tall mountain above the water level. *Do not stir*, as this causes the plaster to set too quickly. Gently mix by cutting through the plaster and water with a spatula or other tool. When ready, the mix should leave an opaque coating on your finger.
- 3) Pour just enough of the mixture onto the wire mesh shapes to coat the top surface and penetrate the holes. Smooth with a large spatula. Pour a few extra just to find odd shapes.

Presented at the American Medallic Sculpture Association's Workshop and Conference, University of Hartford, July 1992



When the plaster is set, the coated mesh shapes can be trimmed.

- 4) Trim edges with scissors or snips after the mix is well set. Now turn it over. Remove the paper towel, if used, and, with newly mixed plaster, patch the underside, if needed.
- 5) When dry, draw on the plaster shape with a pencil; erase where needed with a damp paper towel.

From here on, always mix very small amounts of plaster. Use less than 1/2" water in a small bowl and drop in only enough plaster for a consistency that is a little thinner than your original mixture. *Do not stir*. If you stop working for even an hour, wet the entire surface of the plaster model by dipping it in water before adding new plaster. Keep a bowl of

water on the worktable at all times. You can dip the medal-in-progress as needed. Always work on a damp surface; if you don't, the new plaster will not adhere to the old.

6) Drip plaster on your forms. Lines can be built by beading drips from the tip of a tool. You can model with your finger tips, metal tools or wood implements. When the plaster hardens, you can carve, scrape or incise. Modeling and carving in plaster require some practice, but patience and persistence pay off.

If you need to enlarge or change the shape at any stage, chip away the plaster down to the mesh; add more wire mesh if needed. Use fine wire to attach the new mesh to the model. With this method you also can build three-dimensional shapes. Remember, the plaster must be supported by wire mesh.

Images can be defined by beading drips of plaster on the form (left). If you wish to enlarge or change the shape of the form at any stage, chip away the plaster down to the mesh, adding more mesh if needed before reapplying plaster.





A Portfolio of Medallic Art:



Linda Adamiak "The Initiation" cast bronze



Jill Burkee "Holy Stone" cast bronze



E. Richard Bonham "The Ring" fine pewter



Chloe Dellaport
"Enlightenment of Nicodemas II"
cast bronze



Elizabeth Gordon Chandler "Jonathan Edwards" struck bronze



Sergio De Giusti "Bound Figure" cast bronze

1992 Exhibition Medals (Part II)



Kenneth Douglas "Holy Family" struck silver



Michael Evert "Untitled" cast bronze



Hector Garcia "Flight" cast bronze



Rusdi Genest
"Surreptitiously Shuttling within Ostentatious Temples"
cast bronze



Geri Jimenez Gould "Peace of the Earth" fired terra cotta



Jill Griwatz
"Silence Is Broken"
cast bronze



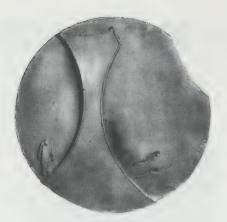
Amanullah Haiderzad "Echo of East No. 1" cast bonded bronze



Peter Johnson "Thronged" cast bronze



Marcel Jovine "Creation" struck copper



Mico Kaufman
"I"
cast bronze



Jeffrey Maron
"Untitled"
hand-made silver and bronze



Irving Mazze
"Toulouse-Lautrec"
hand-engraved onyx



Anne Lazare Mirvish
"Landscape I"
cast bronze



Irean Oliver Oakley "World Wind" cast acrylic



Jeanne Stevens-Sollman "Dove of Peace Emerges" mixed media



Bernard Schmidt "M. Lunacies" cast bronze



Holli Alexander Schwartz

"Ronnie's Recline"

cast bronze



Alex Shagin "Le Corbusier" cast bronze



Paul Takacs
"Victory at Springfield"
struck bronze



Dan Telleen
"Untitled"
cast iron meteorite and bronze



Patricia Van Ouse-McLatchy "Passages II" cast bronze



E. Bud Wertheim "Alessandro dal Prato" cast bronze

"The New Medal" Traveling Exhibition

The American Medallic Sculpture Association is presenting a traveling exhibition of members' works entitled "The New Medal." Following the exhibit's debut engagement at the Franklin Mint Museum in Philadelphia, May 15 through June 14, one piece from each exhibiting artist will travel to the American Numismatic Association World's Fair of Money[®] in Detroit, representing the first sponsored show of fine art at an ANA convention. The complete exhibition then will travel to Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington; the National Sculpture Society Gallery in New York City; and finally to the ANA's Museum in Colorado Springs.

Immediately upon viewing "The New Medal" exhibition, you know that you have left behind all preconceived ideas about what constitutes medallic art. Ideas such as "medals are round," "medals are flat," "medals are realistic" and "medals are coins" simply vaporize as you enter this world of imaginative beauty and provocative statement. If one can say that a picture is worth a thousand words, then an art medal truly can generate a thousand pictures in your mind. You'll experience the artists' personal thoughts and fantasies. Break open a meteorite to reveal a galaxy of stars . . . feel the emotional impact of war and homelessness . . . witness the pain of loneliness and the pleasure of solitude . . . see the mighty tyrannosaurus rex prowling his territory . . . travel to Afghanistan and view Old Kabul Bazaar.

Each of these themes and more is represented in "The New Medal" exhibition. This show brings together nearly 300 works created by many of today's most accomplished medallic artists. What does one look for in an art medal? Surely, this is a personal decision. The skill of the artist is paramount, but we also look for that special message that reaches out and touches us, a concept that makes us laugh or quietly reflect.

Like all forms of art, the medal has changed over the centuries. From its earliest roots in the coinage of the ancients to its current status as one of the ultimate collectibles of our time, the evolution of the medal is a magnificent commentary on its era. Today's medalists gravitate toward cast rather than struck pieces, particularly when producing limited editions. The mints and foundries that manufacture these works for them have developed a new understanding of the artists' creations, resulting in the medalists having greater control over their work. As technical problems become solvable, the artists are free to expand their creativity.

Experience "The New Medal" and enjoy works created by the members of the American Medallic Sculpture Association. In today's world of "bigger is better," the medal serves as a remarkable reminder that small can be monumental.

Carol Everhart, Exhibit Curator

July 27- 31, 1994 American Numismatic Association World's Fair of Money[®], Detroit

August 11- September 15, 1994 Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington

December 6, 1994-March 3, 1995 National Sculpture Society Gallery, New York

April 21- October 27, 1995 American Numismatic Association Museum, Colorado Springs

..... AMSA Limited-Edition Medals

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"Bursting Forward"
by Rusdi Genest

About the spirit of man and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

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Still Available
"Seed Planter"
by Jeanne Stevens-Sollman

Inspired by Margaret Mead's thoughts on changing the world.



"Pearl"
by Virginia Janssen

Metaphor about a pearl and a woman.

Please photocopy and send with check payable to "American Medallic Sculpture Association" at address below.

AMSA Medals Order Form and Membership Application

Enclosed is US\$100 for Janssen's "Pearl" (US\$75 for AMSA members) Enclosed is US\$100 for Sollman's "Seed Planter" (US\$75 for AMSA members) Enclosed is US\$95 for Genest's "Bursting Forward" (US\$70 for AMSA members) ☐ Enclosed is US\$35 for annual AMSA dues (United States and Canada) ☐ Enclosed is US\$20 for annual student AMSA dues (United States and Canada; copy of valid student I.D. required to confirm full-time student status) ☐ Enclosed is US\$45 for annual AMSA dues (outside United States and Canada) Enclosed is US\$70 for annual AMSA and FIDEM dues (United States only) TOTAL AMOUNT OF ENCLOSED CHECK \$ Name: Address: City: _____ State: ____ Zip: ____ Phone (day): _____ Phone (evening): _____ Please check if you do NOT want your address shown in any listing of members Please check if you do NOT want your phone number shown in any listing of members I am: an artist a sculptor a dealer a collector a producer/supplier other

American Medallic Sculpture Association, P.O. Box 2727, New York, NY 10185

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